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MEXICO: ITS PEOPLE AND ITS PROBLEM

BY MAJOR CASSIUS E. GILLETTE,
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Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as international law, for there is nobody authorized to pass such laws, no tribunal to interpret them, and no executive authorized to enforce them. Nations in this are in precisely the condition of a group of men in a mining camp in a wilderness where there is no government and no established laws.

Yet in both cases certain fundamental principles are recognized and those who violate them are likely to have a fight on their hands in which disinterested parties are likely to take sides against them. Thus in the mining camp it is recognized that each man owns his own claim and can work it by any method he pleases provided he does not thereby interfere with the rights of his neighbor.

So with nations; each nation is considered to own its territory, to have certain attributes called sovereignty. It can work its lands as it desires, provide its own government, and regulate its own affairs as it pleases and settle its internal disputes as it sees fit. In general no nation has a right to interfere with the sovereignty of another and remain its friend. Any such interference is really an act of war.

Nations have the inherent right to change their governments by any method without other nations having the slightest right to interfere even though it be difficult at times for those other nations to determine what faction to recognize as the actual government.

Under ordinary conditions no nation is bound to recognize or hold diplomatic relations with a government of whose character it disapproves. There is one very exceptional case, however, in this behalf. The relations of the United States to other American republics, particularly Mexico and Central America, are different from those between any other countries. The Monroe Doctrine is the cause of this. Privately suggested primarily by England to prevent the Holy Alliance from helping Spain to recover her colonies, its real justifiable meaning is that we claim the right to try, on this continent, the experiment of government by the people unhampered and uncontaminated by European monarchical systems. It has not inherently

the force of law, but we will fight for it, and that makes it about as good as law.

There is one important point, however, generally overlooked. The doctrine does not contemplate for a moment any right to dictate the form of government of other countries on this continent, especially those existing at the time of President Monroe.

We have not a shadow of a right to demand that Canada become a republic, and no one has ever even suggested such a right, and we have not a shadow of a right in the same behalf as regards Mexico.

Spain colonized and owned that country for a hundred years before England established her colonies here. We will prevent and did prevent Europe from making a monarchy of Mexico, but if Mexico wants to make a monarchy of herself the Monroe Doctrine does not apply. We have made it apply but we have no moral right to do so. We have the right to be what President Wilson calls "the champions of constitutional government," within our own borders, and to encourage it elsewhere, but we have no right to interfere with the sovereignty of Mexico. If she wishes or finds it unavoidable to change rulers by force it is really none of our business.

It would seem that we should have the full right of non-recognition in such cases, but even this is not true. The rights that we have almost automatically arrogated under an extension of the Monroe Doctrine have been acceded to by foreign governments and the result is practically that if we do not recognize a *de facto* government of Mexico, we can kill it and even destroy that country simply by non-recognition as we are doing today.

The big nations that divided up Poland have been condemned by civilization ever since. But the partition of Poland is a very mild matter, in comparison to the horrors of what we are doing in Mexico. That our people stand for it for a moment is only explainable on the ground of ignorance of the true facts.

This ignorance of ours concerning Mexico is one of the most amazing things of the age. The average American really knows less of our next-door neighbor to the south than he does of Germany or Japan.

The typical and crowning error of this is the apparent assumption by the President, press, and people, that the so-called "Constitutionalists" of Mexico are analogous to our revolutionary sires trying to establish a true democracy in the so-called republic of Mexico. On the contrary they are vastly more similar to the followers of Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Cochise, or Rain-in-the-Face.

When the Spaniards came to Mexico they found two kinds of people—civilized Aztecs, Toltecs, Oaxacans, etc., probably of European origin, and the western Apache-like people, probably derived from Asiatic barbarians. The Spaniards intermarried with the civilized races and made peons of the barbarian element. So today there are two races in Mexico, one a cultured Latin race and the other uncouth savages more or less “tamed.”

Absolutely the only difference between the common peons of Mexico and our reservation Indians lies in the fact that we killed off most of our Indians, and put the remnants upon reservations, while the Spaniards “converted” theirs (with an axe if necessary) and put them to work. They have not changed a whit in four hundred years. They have the habits, the food, the clothing, the houses, the superstitions, and the vermin, that they had when Cortez came. I have seen thousands of their abodes, never one with a chimney, never one with anything but a dirt floor. They build the fire on the floor and the smoke gets out as best it can. They have acquired nothing from civilization but its diseases, firearms, horses, a few crude cooking utensils, and a very thin religious veneer for their old superstitions, mostly used with a view to better luck in gambling.

Their clothing is exactly what Cortez found, substituting a little cheaper cotton cloth for some of the skins, and omitting the feathers.

Beginning at the feet this costume consists of rude, homemade, leather sandals, worn part of the time on feet more nearly resembling hoofs. It can safely be asserted that 50 per cent of Villa’s “patriots” have cracks a quarter of an inch deep in their hoof-like heels. They encase their legs generally in “pants” made of unbleached cotton sheeting, held up by a kind of shawl or sash twisted around the waist; a blouse or jumper of the same material; no underwear or socks; a blanket made by hand, with a central slit for the head to go through—and a straw sugar-loaf hat 18 inches high, with a brim 2 feet wide—unkempt hair, generally “inhabited.” It can safely be guaranteed that there are not a dozen combs in Villa’s camp, nor any soap used for bathing.

It is also a safe assertion that not 5 per cent of Villa’s “army” knows that they are called “Constitutionalists” at all; not 1 per cent could spell or pronounce the word constitution, nor identify a single letter in its make-up; not one in a hundred would know what was meant by a constitution nor would care a continental about it if you

talked to him for a week. And if you handed him a ballot, he would not have the slightest conception of its use except possibly to roll a cigarette and he would prefer a corn husk for that.

Their highest ideal of life is an uncurbed freedom, to ride a horse, carry a gun, and "earn their bread by the sweat of their squaws" in true Indian fashion. They have no desire for "votes for men," but are willing to compromise on "work for women." The women, like savages the world over, are willing to work. The men work only when compelled to do so by hunger, and then only enough to get corn and beans. The problem of every wise employer of labor in Mexico is to get the peons to have use for higher wages. Better food and better shelter will give more work for each dollar invested than corn, beans, and a blanket, and make a better country to live in. But every increase in wages beyond the pittance required for those almost invariably goes for pulque or idleness.

They seem to have only two emotions above those necessary for racial preservation,—fear, and the joy of destroying. Where the occasion would seem to call for anger, joy, resentment, patriotism, playfulness, or hate, the average peon smashes windows, preferably those of plate glass.

When Mexico threw off the Spanish yoke in 1821, the peons in the out-of-the-way places filled up, walled up, and hid, every possible mine. A few months ago the "rebels" blew up with dynamite a coal mine which they knew belonged to the family of Madero, destroying about half a million dollars' worth of property and equipment. These rebels, who are the desperate offscourings of the peon class, have destroyed everything in northern Mexico that means "work for men," so far as they have been able to reach it, bridges, houses, banks, railroad stations, tunnels, theatres, cars, locomotives, culverts, everything. They have looted churches, missions, residences, banks, stores, and have murdered and held for ransom many persons of all nationalities.

The civilized people number perhaps two millions, a race proud and ambitious—individually too ambitious, because too many do not seem able to perceive that in trying to govern a country in which there are less than three million intelligent people against over twelve million untutored savages, absolute unity is necessary in the civilized ranks.

The fundamental trouble with the country, though, is that the

two million own all the land. The twelve million own nothing. Millions of them have no home but a blanket. The rest live in shacks, huts, or cabins, built generally by themselves on other people's land, and they generally work for the land owner. In this they are exactly in the position of the few scattered Indians in our West who live under precisely similar conditions, the only essential difference being in their relative numbers, most of ours being gathered on reservations.

Between the few civilized land owners and the numerous landless savages, is a small class of intelligent people who are neither peons nor land owners, and who are naturally dissatisfied with conditions. Many of these are ready for any disturbance that may bring a change.

Add now the fact that all three types come from fighting stock, and that to all the original natives bloodshed was a routine matter, and you will see that "government by the people" is here a preposterous dream. No republic nor anything like a republic ever has been or ever can be made out of Mexican peons or any other North American Indians, except after a long period of gradual development of small landholders. We have never even attempted it with our own; why should we try to force it upon Mexico? We have several times given some of them land in severalty; they promptly drank or gambled it away. Nothing is so easy as to start a "revolution" in Mexico, if setting savages on the warpath is revolution; and bandit outbreaks under any pretext from "constitutional government" to "forty acres and a mule" are something to be expected under any government except one of iron which handles both savage and renegade with prompt and severe punishment. Under a lax or hampered government banditism becomes a business, aided wonderfully by the topography of the country. Leaving out a strip from 50 to 100 miles wide around the coast, the body of Mexico is a plateau about 3000 feet above the sea along the northern border and 8000 in the southern portion. This plateau is fringed by a range of high mountains from whose crests down to the sea is an indescribably rough country where roads are practically unknown, all traffic being by pack trains on rough mountain trails. The plateau is cut up by numerous rough mountain ranges with few roads. From these fastnesses bandits are difficult to dislodge. They raid the valleys and then sneak back to their lairs in the mountains.

No matter how many bandits may be ravaging the country, each band is as independent as a wolf. To capture large game like

a city they unite just as wolves that kill rabbits individually unite to pull down a buffalo. There is no organized amalgamation, however skilfully the mob may be press-agented into an army. Their method of taking a city is strikingly like a band of coyotes around a buffalo. They do not besiege the city nor storm it; they camp around it and cut off its supplies until it is starved out. In the sparse semi-desert of north Mexico this plan works successfully—in the richer southern states the garrison can get supplies by sorties. The recent "storming" of Torreon by Villa is probably largely newspaper picturesqueness, though possibly the hordes of savages gathered were sufficiently numerous to venture a capture by assault.

The regular or federal army of Mexico is composed mostly of peons, but they are officered by educated gentlemen, mostly graduates of the West Point of Mexico, Chapultepec. A very creditable discipline is maintained, but irregularities accompany all armies, in war times, our own Civil War being no exception. Skilful press-agenting, however, can make the incidents of General Huerta's army appear on a par with the regular business of the bandit "army" of which the most prominent leader now is Villa.

Now that he has dominated most of the other bandit leaders and been supplied with cannon, his forces may have some semblance of an army.

A typical example of the necessity of severity on the part of the government of Mexico in treating renegades who are willing to risk savage domination to gain personal control, as Madero did, is shown by General Angeles, now with Villa's "army." This man is a trained artillerist. He was imprisoned by General Huerta for treason. His wife pleaded for his release and he himself promised upon his most sacred honor that if released he would remain absolutely neutral in the struggle. Yet he went to the aid of the rebels as fast as he could go, consenting to serve under Villa to help destroy the civilization of his own country. General Diaz was not as kind-hearted a man as General Huerta.

Serious consideration at the moment is being given to the discussion of ways and means of restoring order in Mexico, the President being as firm as ever in the conviction that the solution must be acceptable to the "Constitutionalists." The futility of this can be readily grasped when it is reflected that Madero himself, in whose name they are fighting, was not "acceptable" to them. Practically

not a single leader who helped Madero fight for "constitutional liberty" came in when the fight was won. Orozco alone did so, and he stayed only two weeks when he went back to fight Madero. The others all stayed on in "rebellion" against Madero, exactly as they had fought Diaz. Their business is brigandage and loot, and their pretexts, always high-sounding, are varied to suit the occasion.

Villa pretends to be fighting for Madero's "principles," yet recently he viciously fought a co-worker for the same cause, one Maximo Castillo, Madero's own bodyguard, who recently helped the cause of "freedom" by gleefully wrecking a loaded passenger train in a blazing tunnel. At least Villa says Castillo did. The latter lays it to Villa's men. It should be carefully borne in mind that these outrages are being done, not by Mexico but by the savages who are destroying Mexico.

If Villa became president of Mexico tomorrow, he would have to fight every one of his followers that he did not provide with an office, just as Madero did.

Since 1821 Mexico has been called a republic—it has never been one in reality for fifteen minutes. It was twice an empire, several times a military dictatorship, but never a government by the people for a moment. For fifty years it was one continued succession of revolts, rebellions, intrigues, anarchy, and destruction. One president actually rebelled against himself, as it were, and took the field to become a dictator, saying the country could not be governed under a constitution. Finally, a war hero, a military genius, a great constructive statesman, a skilful diplomat, and last, but by no means least, an "iron ruler" appeared in Porfirio Diaz, who crushed renegade and bandit with merciless vigor, placated respectable opposition, and established peace and order. He worked a miracle of government; a rigorous military dictatorship under all the forms of a pure democracy. For thirty years under Diaz peace prevailed and the country, the richest in the world, prospered.

This continued till the greatest source of wealth the country possessed was discovered. When it was proven that Mexico contains an empire of oil, the richest deposits in the world, the troubles of Mexico began.

Americans first drilled for oil but found little. Later Sir Weetman Pearson, an English engineer, holding some pretty favorable government contracts, drilled much deeper and found oil in enormous

quantities. Standard Oil never drills any pioneer wells. They wait till others find the oil and then go "buy" it—at their own figures. Like the American eagle which never tries to catch a fish, but waits till the osprey catches one and then goes and gets it, without risking taking cold by getting wet. But Sir Weetman was a pretty large fish hawk, and he seems still to have the oil.

The enormous concentration of wealth in few hands that has come from Standard Oil methods is probably the greatest menace to our institutions that exists, and it is possible that Diaz, who was a wise and farseeing ruler, did not want Standard Oil to do to Mexico what it was doing to the United States. Some assert that his friends, and even he himself, were partners with Lord Cowdray. In any event he protected that fish hawk from the oil eagle. Then curious things happened. Diaz, who had been lauded for many years on all hands as the greatest constructive statesman of the age, began to be systematically reviled. One John Kenneth Turner, an impecunious newspaper scribbler, was "staked" by some one to make a ten months' trip to Mexico with money enough to pose successfully as a capitalist looking for big investments, taking along such luxuries as a traveling companion and a private secretary. He produced a scurrilous misrepresentation of Mexico, and especially of Diaz, called *Barbarous Mexico*.

Curiously enough, before oil was discovered in Mexico, Mr. Bryan, presidential candidate of the Democratic party of the United States, and editor of *The Commoner*, paid the following tribute to General Diaz:

President Diaz has left an indelible impress on his country. His administration covers an area of great and permanent improvement in the condition of that nation.

When I was in the city of Mexico I was especially impressed with his interest in education, and to education the people of Mexico must look for the laying of that broad foundation which is necessary to stable government.

I need not comment upon the executive ability of President Diaz. He has won a place among the great executive officers of the world. As one who feels deeply interested in the future of the Republic of Mexico, I rejoice in the progress that the country has made under Porfirio Diaz.

After oil had been developed he referred to him in the following picturesque language:

What that bloody old butcher, that bloody old tyrant who has done nothing but murder and butcher for thirty years, and would be doing so yet only that such patriots as Madero, Carranza and Villa rose to throw off the yoke of tyranny which resulted in finally driving him from the country.

On September 9, 1912, Lawrence F. Converse appeared before the sub-committee of the committee on foreign relations of the United States Senate and testified under oath as follows:

I was taken into the confidence (of Madero and his officers) as an officer on their staff. Mr. Madero told me his money was coming from that source (Standard Oil). The three men mentioned (Francisco Madero, Braulio Hernandez, Madero's secretary of state, and Abraham Gonzales, governor of Chihuahua) said that Standard Oil would back them to the last ditch.

Mr. Madero stated to me several times, as also did his other trusted officers, that the Standard Oil Company was back of them. He told me that several times for a positive fact.

They were to have a high rate of interest and there was a tentative agreement as to an oil concession in the southern states of Mexico.

Before the same sub-committee S. G. Hopkins of Washington, D. C., testified that he had been attorney for Madero and his revolutionists from the first outbreak. He is counsel for the rebels now and they have made their headquarters in his office down to the present day. He admitted on the stand that during a part of the time since Madero "broke out," he, Hopkins, was counsel for the Waters-Pierce Oil Company operating in Mexico and owned by Standard Oil. Mr. Hopkins is well known as a press-agent of great resources.

The possibilities of this situation are such as to demand strict observance on the part of the United States of the accepted rules of international law, irrespective of the alleged personal qualities of Mexican presidents or would-be presidents as they appear in the press.¹

After about the proper length of time for *Barbarous Mexico* to permeate the minds of the people of the United States, Madero began his revolution. His propaganda was "free land to the peons." In this he did not even have the merit of originality. That precise thing had been the shibboleth of every renegade outbreak from 1821 till the time of Diaz, 1876, and there were literally hundreds of them. Not one of his predecessors had ever made the slightest effort to make

¹ See *The Trend Magazine* for April, 1914.

good their lure. All that Madero did in this behalf was to have his brother Gustavo go down to Morelos and buy a large hacienda at \$12 a hectare and sell it to the government at \$36—for free distribution.

As shown above, the Monroe Doctrine gives an awful power for good or evil. In justice it should limit our normal right of non-recognition. As it stands President Wilson's refusal on March 7, 1913, to recognize General Huerta has absolutely prevented anybody from lending money to the Mexican government, except at their own personal risks, for President Wilson can at any moment recognize Villa as president of Mexico, and what Villa or Carranza would do to Huerta's bonds needs no demonstration.

But we have gone far beyond mere non-recognition. European bankers have refused to lend money to the government of Mexico because of secret requests made to their governments by President Wilson. He also directed the Postmaster-General to demand a settlement from Mexico of about a million dollars at a time when such demand would hurt civilized Mexico most. All these things lie within the power of President Wilson. How unjust and wrong they are, time will surely show.